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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS

Preparation of a plan of action for a United Nations decade for human rights education

Report of the Secretary-General

I. BACKGROUND

World Conference on Human Rights

1. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1/ adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna, 14-25 June 1993) contains many provisions relating to human rights education. In the Declaration, the Conference reaffirmed that, in accordance with international instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex), States are duty-bound to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Education, it was stated, should promote understanding, tolerance, peace and friendly relations between the nations and all racial or religious groups and encourage the development of United Nations activities in pursuance of those objectives. The Conference affirmed that education on human rights and the dissemination of proper information, both theoretical and practical, play an important role in the promotion and respect of human rights for all, and that this should be integrated in educational policies at both the national and the international level.

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* A/49/50/Rev.1.

2. The Conference further declared human rights education, training and public information to be essential for the promotion and achievement of stable and harmonious relations among communities and for fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and peace. It called on States to strive to eradicate illiteracy; to direct education towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also called upon States and institutions to include human rights, humanitarian law, democracy and the rule of law as subjects in the curricula of all learning institutions in formal and non-formal settings. The Conference recommended that States develop specific programmes and strategies for ensuring the widest human rights education and the dissemination of public information, taking into account the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, 2/ adopted by the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, held at Montreal in March 1993, and other human rights instruments and taking particular account of the human rights needs of women.

3. In addition, the Conference called for a strengthening of the World Public Information Campaign for Human Rights carried out by the United Nations. Further the Conference recommended that the advisory services and technical assistance programmes of the United Nations system should be able to respond immediately to requests from States for educational and training activities in the field of human rights as well as for special education concerning standards as contained in international human rights instruments and in humanitarian law and their application to special groups such as military forces, law enforcement personnel, police and the health profession. Finally, the Conference stated that the proclamation of a United Nations decade for human rights education should be considered in order to promote, encourage and focus the above-mentioned educational activities.

General Assembly

4. The General Assembly, in its resolution 48/127 of 29 December 1993, expressed its conviction that human rights education is a universal priority in that it contributes to a concept of development consistent with the dignity of the human person, which must include consideration of the diversity of groups such as children, women, youths, persons with disabilities, the ageing, indigenous people, minorities and other groups. The Assembly noted that human rights education involves more than providing information but rather is a life-long process by which people at all levels of development and in all strata of society learn respect for the dignity of others and the means and methods of ensuring that respect within a democratic society.

5. Also in resolution 48/127, the Assembly appealed to all Governments to step up their efforts to eradicate illiteracy and to direct education towards the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and urged governmental and non-governmental educational agencies to intensify their efforts to establish and implement programmes of human rights education. The Assembly took note of the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, adopted by the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, and recommended that Governments and non-governmental organizations consider that plan in preparing national plans for human rights education. The Assembly

requested the Commission on Human Rights, in cooperation with Member States, human rights treaty-monitoring bodies, other appropriate bodies and competent non-governmental organizations, to consider proposals for a United Nations decade for human rights education, which should be incorporated by the Secretary-General into a plan of action for such a decade and submitted, through the Economic and Social Council, to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, with a view to the proclamation of a decade for human rights education.

6. The General Assembly, further, requested the Secretary-General to consider the establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education, to be administered by the Centre for Human Rights of the Secretariat, invited the specialized agencies and United Nations programmes to develop activities to further human rights education, and called upon non-governmental organizations, educators, the media and others to increase their involvement in education in human rights, and to cooperate with the Centre for Human Rights in preparing for a United Nations decade for human rights education.

Commission on Human Rights

7. The Commission on Human Rights considered the issue of a decade for human rights education at its fiftieth session. It adopted resolution 1994/51, entitled "Proclamation of a decade for human rights education", in which it requested the Economic and Social Council to request the General Assembly to proclaim the 10-year period beginning on 1 January 1995 as the decade for human rights education. In addition, the Secretary-General was requested to consider the establishment of a voluntary fund for human rights education, and States were urged to develop programmes and books for the teaching of human rights in primary and secondary education. Member States, the specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations were urged to develop plans of work and to allocate resources and provide technical cooperation for support of the objectives of the decade for human rights education, taking into account the multi-ethnic character of many societies and the special needs of groups such as children, women, indigenous populations, minorities and disabled persons. The Commission, further, encouraged the human rights monitoring bodies, in particular the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, to intensify their efforts in relation to the implementation by States parties of their treaty-based obligations regarding human rights education, and invited the chairpersons of those bodies to reflect on how each committee could best contribute to the promotion of human rights education.

8. The Commission also encouraged the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in cooperation with Member States, the monitoring bodies, intergovernmental organizations and others, to include among his specific objectives a plan of action for a decade for human rights education. Finally, the Secretary-General was invited to present to the General Assembly at its forty-ninth session, through the Economic and Social Council, a plan of action containing any additional activities resulting from consultations taken with the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Member States, bodies specializing in the field, governmental and non-governmental organizations and others.

9. The present report has been prepared pursuant to the requests of the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights.

International human rights instruments and human rights education

10. International human rights instruments contain principles relating to education in general and its human rights content in particular. Reference may be made to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (article 26), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 13) and the Convention of the Rights of the Child (General Assembly resolution 44/25, annex, articles 28 and 29). These instruments set targets or set forth legal obligations relating to the right to education and its human rights content and two Committees, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee on the Rights of the Child, are mandated to monitor State party fulfilment of their obligations. Education under these three international instruments has the following purposes:

(a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;

(b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;

(c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality, and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples, racial, ethnic and religious groups;

(d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free society;

(e) The furtherance of the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

II. CONSULTATIONS REGARDING A PLAN OF ACTION FOR THE DECADE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

Consultations with human rights treaty bodies

11. Pursuant to the provisions of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action relating to human rights education and taking into account the strong interest in this subject shown by the treaty-based bodies prior to and during the World Conference, the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights wrote in early December 1993 to the chairpersons of the treaty-monitoring bodies (Human Rights Committee; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Committee on the Rights of the Child; Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and Committee against Torture) requesting their guidance and practical suggestions on which rights should be primarily selected for the purpose of human rights education, training and information; what criteria should be adopted to determine which projects submitted by States should be given priority; and which professions or groups should be selected for priority consideration in human

rights education, training and information activities. A request was also made for any suggestions of practical and concrete projects or programmes which could serve to implement the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action's provisions relating to human rights education, training and information. Detailed replies have been received from the Human Rights Committee, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

Human Rights Committee

12. The Human Rights Committee stated that since its first session in March 1977, it has considered a large number of States parties' reports and individual communications. In undertaking those activities, the Committee has often pointed to the pivotal importance of adequate human rights education, training and public information, which constitute an essential condition for the accomplishment of the objectives set forth in both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenants on Human Rights. Basic information on the fundamental principles and rights enshrined in those texts as well as on the moral and philosophical concepts behind them should thus be, in the view of the Committee, a primary objective of the forthcoming decade for human rights education. Such information should be widely disseminated by any available means and reach the largest possible audience, particularly children. In that regard, specific efforts should be made to ensure that primary and secondary school curricula include in an appropriate way such human rights education.

13. The Committee further stated that specific training should be targeted to the benefit of different categories of persons or professions and related to the interpretation and enforcement of the pertinent rights and freedoms guaranteed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex). Particular attention should be given to the training of law-enforcement officials (police, army, security forces and prison officers), judges, lawyers and members of other professions, such as journalists, whose activities have a direct bearing on the realization of the objectives set out in the Covenant. In implementing human rights education, training and public information programmes, the Committee said that careful consideration should be given to possible assistance from, and cooperation with, international, regional or national institutions, commissions or other bodies engaged in activities in the field of human rights.

Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

14. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights considered the issue of human rights education pursuant to the above-mentioned request during its ninth session, in December 1993. The Committee decided to devote its day of general discussion at its session in December 1994 to human rights education and the promotion of knowledge of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. That general discussion will be organized and conducted on as broad a basis as possible with participation encouraged from relevant United Nations and non-governmental organizations. Committee member Mrs. Virginia Bonoan-Dandan was nominated to be the focal point for preparing

the discussions and she was asked to prepare a background paper with the assistance of the Secretariat.

Committee on the Rights of the Child

15. The Committee on the Rights of the Child drew attention to article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which, referring to the aims of education, states that education shall be directed to the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Citing article 28 on the right to education, the Chairperson noted that the Convention places particular importance on the role of education for fostering mutual understanding, peace and tolerance. The Committee stressed that education should be based on the equal enjoyment of rights by all children without any discrimination, the primary consideration of the best interests of the child, the need to ensure the survival and development of all children, and the need to encourage respect for their views and the active participation of children in society.

16. The Committee's view was that, as the provisions of the Convention address an entire set of rights which are elements of an interdependent and mutually reinforcing entity, it would not be advisable to emphasize, for purposes of human rights education, any specific rights. Rather, for the Committee, an overall integrated approach to human rights education should be employed in the development of programmes. As to categories of persons to be given priority in human rights education, the Committee listed law enforcement officials, teachers, the judiciary, social workers, the medical profession, the mass media, employers and labour inspectors, and children themselves. The Committee concluded by suggesting that human rights education efforts should reach the largest possible audience, through the use of formal education, and through other measures, such as the production of audio-visual materials.

Committee against Torture

17. The Committee against Torture convened an informal working group of the Committee to deal with human rights education during its twelfth session, in April 1994. The Committee noted that article 10 of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (General Assembly resolution 39/46, annex) imposes on States parties duties with regard to education and information on the prohibition against torture. The Committee was of the opinion that human rights educational activities, including those addressing the prohibition against torture, should be directed to as wide a public as possible. For the Committee, this could be accomplished, inter alia, through the use of national human rights commissions, and primary, secondary and post-secondary education institutions.

18. The Committee was of the view that educating the public on the prohibition of torture should be a priority in human rights education efforts, and that special emphasis should be given in this regard to the training of law enforcement personnel, medical personnel, prison officials, and other such groups. The Committee added that these target groups should not be seen as exclusive, but that educating the general public on human rights issues was of

great importance. The Committee provided a number of detailed suggestions relating to education for the particular target groups.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

19. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considered the question of human rights education at its 1994 session in New York. The members of the Committee indicated that they would like to take an active part in the preparation and implementation of the plan of action for the decade for human rights education. The information materials prepared for the decade should include the rights of women and information about the work of implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex). One of the likely themes of the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held at Beijing in 1995, is increasing awareness on the part of women of their rights and the Committee suggested that the Conference would provide an excellent opportunity for the Committee, all of whose members are expected to attend, the Centre for Human Rights, specialized agencies and a large number of concerned non-governmental organizations to meet to discuss how this concern can be included in the activities of the decade for human rights education.

20. The Committee stated that projects submitted by States parties relating to education about women's rights clearly deserve priority, including those which emphasize education about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In the Committee's view, accomplishing the goal of the decade implies recognizing the importance of the human rights activities of the Centre and of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Labour Organization and the competent non-governmental organizations. The Committee further stated that it would be important for all of those bodies to constitute a kind of advisory body for States in the development and enhancement of regional and national programmes and projects in human rights education. Special focus should be given to reaching women at the grass-roots level. Similarly, in its country projects in advisory services, the Centre for Human Rights should include elements for human rights education aimed at sex equality and women's participation, especially in the democratization process.

Specialized agencies and United Nations programmes

21. During regular inter-agency consultations the Centre for Human Rights has discussed with specialized agencies and United Nations programmes human rights education, training and information, in particular with a view to preparing for the decade for human rights education. An informal working group has been set up to review the activities of the various organizations and programmes in the field of human rights education, to exchange information and ideas and to coordinate human rights education activities.

22. UNESCO has provided information on the areas in which it has been focusing its human rights educational efforts. These include promotion of normative action; preparation, dissemination and implementation of action plans for the development of human rights education; preparation of guidelines for various

target audiences involved in the educational process, including teacher-trainers and those responsible for curriculum development; preparation of teaching materials for various levels and forms of education; and promotion of international and regional networks of educational and research institutions dealing with education for peace and human rights. Information was also provided on the World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy.

23. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided a note setting forth the High Commissioner's approach and activities in the area of refugee law promotion, dissemination and training. The note explained that the traditional approach of UNHCR in its training and dissemination efforts was to promote knowledge and understanding of existing international refugee protection norms and their national implementation. While those factors remained primary objectives for UNHCR, they had now been supplemented by a new approach which focused on prevention, and included attention to human rights instruments, systems and issues. UNHCR is making arrangements to strengthen its capacity to deliver human rights education in these areas, including through the expansion of staff, and the out-posting of training coordinators in important field locations.

24. The Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch of the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the Secretariat stated that efficient and fair criminal justice systems are essential to sustainable social and economic development, and that, therefore, United Nations standards and norms in criminal justice should be subject to the widest possible dissemination. Of particular importance, for the Branch, was assistance in this area to developing countries and countries in transition. The Branch noted the importance of developing manuals and handbooks on the subject.

25. Further information on human rights education is expected to be received for the specialized agencies and United Nations programmes.

Consultations with non-governmental organizations

26. During the fiftieth session of the Commission on Human Rights, a consultation on the question of human rights education, regarding in particular proposals for inclusion in a plan of action for the decade for human rights education, was organized by the Centre for Human Rights. A large number of non-governmental organizations, several specialized agencies and other organizations took part. The preparation of a plan of action for the decade was discussed and the possible contributions of various organizations were reviewed. The importance of human rights education was stressed, as was the need to keep in mind the ongoing activities and the past experience of non-governmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations were invited to make in writing any specific recommendations they might have regarding the plan of action. The Organizing Committee for the People's Decade of Human Rights Education transmitted very detailed suggestions for an approach to the United Nations decade for human rights education and for specific activities for inclusion in a plan of action.

Further consultations

27. Notes verbales have been sent to all States informing them of General Assembly resolution 48/127 and Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/51 and requesting any proposals which they might wish to make for incorporation into the draft plan of action for the United Nations decade for human rights education. Further, letters requesting such information have been addressed to the specialized agencies, human rights treaty-monitoring bodies, and regional and non-governmental organizations.

III. CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION

28. The Centre for Human Rights has for many years been involved in human rights education, principally through its information programme, including the World Public Information Campaign for Human Rights, and through the programme of advisory services and technical assistance in the field of human rights. In the past few years, the scope of the Centre's educational activities has expanded considerably and strategies have been and continue to be developed to ensure that a comprehensive and effective programme is in place. These activities are described in some detail in the reports of the Secretary-General to the Commission on Human Rights on development of public information activities in the field of human rights including the World Public Information Campaign for Human Rights (E/CN.4/1994/36) and on advisory services in the field of human rights (E/CN.4/1994/78).

29. In addition, the report of the Secretary-General on actions taken in relating to the proclamation of a decade for human rights education (E/CN.4/1994/39) contains a section on the present and future role of the Centre for Human Rights in human rights education. The Centre will have a key role to play under the overall supervision of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the plan of action for the decade for human rights education.

IV. ROLE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

30. The High Commissioner for Human Rights has as one of his principal responsibilities coordinating relevant United Nations education and public information programmes in the field of human rights (General Assembly resolution 48/141). More specifically, the Commission on Human Rights encouraged the High Commissioner, acting in cooperation with Member States, the monitoring bodies, international organizations, competent non-governmental organizations and other relevant organs, to include among his specific objectives a plan of action for the United Nations decade for human rights education (Commission resolution 1994/51). The High Commissioner, since his appointment, has given high importance to human rights education, in particular to the preparations for the decade for human rights education. From the High Commissioner's point of view human rights education is in effect essential for the encouragement of stable and harmonious intercommunity relations, for mutual tolerance and understanding and finally for peace. It is thus important for all individuals, all groups and all peoples to be informed of the rights to which they can aspire and the machinery existing for their protection. The decade for

human rights education and the development of a special programme to promote and encourage all the activities in this sphere will, with the cooperation of States, specialized agencies including UNESCO, and non-governmental organizations, contribute towards a "universal human rights culture" which constitutes the best preventive measure against infringements of human rights. A comprehensive approach to human rights education and training should be adopted with special attention to those groups that are in a position to exercise an influence on the human rights of others through the education and training of specialists, "the training of trainers". Among the target groups could be primary and secondary school teachers, magistrates, senior officials and members of the police and the armed forces.

31. Inter-agency cooperation and coordination is essential to human rights education. The High Commissioner underlined the importance of education for human rights during the first meeting of 1994 of the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The High Commissioner has also discussed this issue with Governments, members of treaty-monitoring bodies and non-governmental organizations and stressed the importance of human rights education in the programme of advisory services and technical cooperation.

32. The discussions and decisions of the Economic and Social Council concerning the decade for human rights education will be of crucial importance for the preparation of the plan of action to be submitted to the General Assembly. Also of high importance are the discussions and decisions on this matter of the General Assembly during its forty-eighth session and the Commission on Human Rights at its fiftieth session. Other important elements will emerge from ongoing consultations with Governments, specialized agencies, concerned sectors of the Untied Nations Secretariat, other international organizations, treaty-monitoring bodies and non-governmental organizations. It is the intention of the High Commissioner to review these elements and contributions carefully and to prepare a draft plan of action which will be widely discussed before its submission to the General Assembly.

Notes

1/ A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

2/ See A/CONF.157/PC/42/Add.6.